

Sunday, November 21, 1982

The Washington Post

WORLD NEWS

Nicaragua Accuses Red Cross Official of Spying for U.S. Military

By Edward Cody
Washington Post Foreign Service

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Nov. 20—The revolutionary government has arrested a Nicaraguan Red Cross official on charges he carried out spying missions to gather sensitive military intelligence for American military officers attached to the U.S. Embassy here.

The case, partially reported by the government-guided press, has helped confirm for the Sandinista government and the general public widely held suspicions that what they call "the CIA" (pronounced see-ah), is actively working to undermine this country's three-year-old revolution.

If accusations contained in the indictment

against the official and statements in a confession videotaped after his arrest in July are true, they also provide an unusual glimpse of methods used for collecting on-the-ground intelligence despite diplomatic travel restrictions, and spotlight the U.S. military's continued desire for such first-hand observation even in an era of spy satellites and high-flying reconnaissance planes.

The alleged spy, Nicaraguan Red Cross operations chief Jose René Talavera, has said his confession was obtained under duress.

The United States, while maintaining that information gathering is a normal part of a diplomat's work, has said that all American personnel attached to its embassy here function within internationally accepted norms.

But Washington has not yet replied directly to an official note, dated Sept. 8, from the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry alleging CIA links to a series of terrorist acts and sabotage here and complaining specifically about the Talavera case. The note, handed to the U.S. Embassy, "strongly condemns and protests" what it called "this espionage work" and demands "sufficient clarification."

The Foreign Ministry also provided the embassy with the videotape of the alleged spy's confession, which it described as "grave accusations that affect the diplomatic functions referred to."

According to an indictment handed down Nov. 5 in Judge Yolanda Huembes Ramirez's Managua district criminal court,

Talavera carried out intelligence-gathering assignments in Nicaragua's militarily important Atlantic Coast region from the beginning of 1980 until March of this year.

Talavera, 40, traveled to the troubled region as part of his job to inspect projects for Miskito Indians, the indictment said. But he also reported back, at first to Col. Allan Charles Cornell, then to Maj. Arturo Dávila, U.S. military officers assigned to the Military Liaison Office in the U.S. Embassy here, it added.

His assignments included gathering intelligence on deployment of Nicaragua's Soviet-designed T55 tanks, numbers of troops and patrol boats at Puerto Cabezas, improvement of a landing strip just north of the sleepy

little port, suspected stationing of Soviet-made Mig fighter-bombers at Puerto Cabezas and a suspected Soviet offshore submarine tending base near Corn Island in the Atlantic, the indictment said.

Talavera reported finding no Migs at airstrip, the indictment said. It added that after assigning a fishing boat captain to a look near Corn Island and Grand Cay Island, Talavera also reported back to American contacts in Managua that no Soviet submarine-tending facilities were to be seen.

Talavera also was asked to find whether Soviet or Cuban doctors took part in the forced transport last December of a landing strip just north of the sleepy

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about 12,000 Miskito Indians from the Coco River
that forms the northern border with Honduras to
a settlement at Tasba Pri to the south, the indict-
ment said. This is a particularly sensitive subject
since the Sandinista government has been charged
with abusing Indian rights in the resettlement,
ordered to avoid Miskito collaboration with coun-
terrevolutionary guerrillas infiltrating from Hon-
duras.

Talavera reported all the doctors involved were
Nicaraguan, the indictment said.

Talavera first became acquainted with Cornell
by passing on letters sent to Cornell from the
United States by Jinny Down for her husband,
former National Guard captain Erich Aguilar
Down, who the indictment says is serving a 24-
year term in the Jorge Navarro Social Readapta-
tion Center for activities under the overthrown
government of president Anastasio Somoza. Within
Red Cross credentials, Talavera could visit the
center and turn over the letters.

After some time, Cornell recruited Talavera for
spying and, at the end of his assignment in Ma-
nagua, introduced the Nicaraguan Red Cross ex-
ecutive to Barrera as his new contact, the indict-
ment alleged. The letters became pretexts for vis-
its to the embassy to report on the Atlantic Coast
region after Talavera's visits there, it added.

Talavera's lawyer, Leonel Blandon Juarez, de-
clared in a court deposition that his client, con-
fessed only under duress, including death threats
and physical abuse that has left him anemic.
Blandon categorically denied all charges leveled
against Talavera, including a government state-
ment that Talavera spent three years in the na-
tional military academy under Somoza and sub-
sequently became an informer for the dictator's
National Security Office.

Managua assistant prosecutor Jose Antonio
Bolanos Tercero, who is handling the government
case, will seek to prove Talavera acted out of po-
litical conviction against the Sandinista revolution,
rather than for other reimbursement, Blandon
said in an interview.

Talavera was arrested in the first week of July
at his Red Cross office, Blandon said. Since then,
he has been held in La Chiquita, a maximum se-
curity prison in Managua, he added.

Barrera, Cornell's assistant, who became
Talavera's alleged contact on Cornell's departure,
left Nicaragua on July 16, according to Foreign
Ministry records. He had been accredited in Nic-
aragua since Sept. 5, 1980, and left after what the
Defense Department in Washington said was a
normal tour.

The Military Liaison Office here currently is
headed by Lt. Col. James Kelly. Barrera has not
been replaced.

Such offices, separate from ordinary defense
attaches, normally administer U.S. military aid.
Although the United States has technically bud-
geted aid to Nicaragua, the Reagan administration
has decided against providing it to the present
government.

[A Pentagon spokesman in Washington said
Barrera's main job was to "maintain personal con-
tacts in the government" since there was no aid to
administer. Another Pentagon official said the
Defense Department has no plans to keep the of-
fice open after Kelly's tour ends since "we've got
better things to do" with U.S. military personnel.]

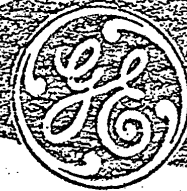
Reagan Adds Meeting With Presidents Of El Salvador and Guatemala to Trip

United Press International

President Reagan has added meetings with the
presidents of El Salvador and Guatemala to his
trip to Latin America, the White House an-
nounced yesterday.

The president will visit Brazil, Colombia, Costa
Rica and Honduras between Nov. 30 and Dec. 4.
The White House press office said Reagan will
meet with President Alvaro Magana of El Sa-
lvador while in Costa Rica.

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